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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 004710

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TAGS: PREL BO SF

SUBJECT: MORALES HOPES TO VISIT SOUTH AFRICA IN EARLY 2007

REF: A. PRETORIA 3182

¶B. PRETORIA 128

¶C. PRETORIA 151

¶D. PRETORIA 4598

Classified By: Political Counselor Raymond Brown. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Bolivian President Morales is seeking to travel to South Africa in early 2007 for the first meeting of the South African-Bolivian Joint Consultative Mechanism (JCM), according to Annelize Schroeder, DFA Deputy Director for the Andes and Cuba. Schroeder said that Bolivia hopes to open an embassy in Pretoria during Morales' visit. The planned visit of Vice President Garcia Linera for late 2006 has been postponed because Morales himself wanted to visit South Africa. The South African and Bolivian governments are currently negotiating the date for the Morales visit, which will depend largely on President Mbeki's schedule.

¶2. (C) Schroeder, who accompanied Minister for the Presidency Essop Pahad on his trip to Bolivia in July (Ref A), said that Morales told Pahad he views South Africa as a "role model" and wants to learn from its experiences. She noted that links between Pretoria and La Paz are deepening. Morales visited South Africa in January (Refs B and C) at the invitation of the Club de Madrid. Minister of Transport and close Mbeki ally Jeff Radebe attended the August opening of the Bolivian Constituent Assembly. Schroeder also said that the South African Ministry of Minerals and Energy is working on concrete cooperation projects with their Bolivian counterparts, focused on energy legislation and policy.

¶3. (C) The African National Congress (ANC) plans to send a delegation to Bolivia in late January 2007, according to National Executive Council member Ebrahim Ebrahim (see Ref D for bio-note). Ebrahim, who has been involved in Bolivia for one and a half years through the Club de Madrid, said that ANC Secretary General Kgalema Motlanthe has agreed to lead the delegation, which would also include the head of the South African Communist Party Blade Nzimande and trade union leader and COSATU Secretary General Zwelinzima Vavi. Ebrahim said that it was critical to bring the SACP and COSATU leaders on the trip, since they can "talk the leftist language," which is important to Morales and his inner circle.

¶4. (C) During his recent trip to Bolivia, Ebrahim said that President Morales met with him privately. Ebrahim sensed that Morales was somewhat "overwhelmed" by the presidency and said he requested guidance and advice from South Africans. Ebrahim expressed concern that Morales had not fully taken on board the ANC message about reconciliation. For this reason, he has pushed the idea of an ANC delegation to build party links and help guide the Bolivians. Ebrahim said that "we

need to ensure that Venezuela is not Morales' only reference point."

15. (C) COMMENT: South Africa does not have significant political or economic interests in Bolivia, but believes strongly that its experience in ending apartheid through negotiation and reconciliation can be exported to other countries in transition. We expect that President Mbeki will agree to a Morales visit, and that ties between the two countries will continue to deepen, as long as Bolivia remains interested. END COMMENT.

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